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Department
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Monday, September 15, 2008

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Subject	Page
Burials*	2-3
Civic engagement*	4-6
Day care*	7
Medicaid	8-9
Poverty summit*	10-13



Sunday, September 14, 2008

Metro Detroit funeral home offers memorial services for unclaimed bodies

Santiago Esparza / The Detroit News

Bodies have started to stack up at some Metro Detroit morgues as families struggle to come up with the money to bury their loved ones.

"Some of the stories are sad," said Wayne County Medical Examiner Dr. Carl Schmidt. "But one of the saddest things that can happen to us is that you die so alone in the world that there is no one left to bury you."

A service was held at Perry Funeral Home in Detroit last month to memorialize those who died without relatives who could bury them. The ceremony was part of a new service, sponsored by houses of worship, that could include up to a dozen churches. Organizers are planning to hold their second service later this month.

"Everybody deserves respect," said Paul Betts, 59, of Detroit, a member St. Christopher & St. Paul Episcopal Church who helped to organize the service. "We are doing something very fundamental and very right. Detroit is not an uncaring place. It is filled with solid and decent human beings who want to help out."

When a relative cannot be found, refuses to claim a body or does not have the money for a burial or cremation, the state and county medical examiner offices pick up the tab.

In the last year, the number of unclaimed or unidentified bodies that the state has paid to bury has increased by 100. Examiners in Oakland and Wayne counties blame tough economic times, but don't keep statistics on how many families can't pay for burials.

In Oakland County, the medical office has seen 10 unclaimed bodies so far this year, up from none three years ago, said Medical Examiner Dr. Ljubisa Dragovic. Counterparts in Macomb see about five bodies a year in which relatives either don't want to claim the body or have no money for burial.

In Wayne, the numbers have remained static, about 10-15 a month, but Schmidt said more families are asking if their relatives can stay in morgue freezers until they raise enough money to bury them. There were 60 bodies or body parts in the freezer one recent week.

County medical examiners said their investigators use fingerprints, tattoos, scars, items found on bodies and question people who live near where a body was found in the identification process.

The cost of death

Michigan spends more than \$2 million annually to help bury or cremate more than 5,000 bodies, according to the State Department of Human Services, which doles out the funding for those qualify for the

assistance .

But the amount of money allocated for burials and cremations was cut last year as lawmakers struggled to balance the state budget. There is a cap of \$700 for burial or cremation. Last year, it was \$900, according to the DHS.

The \$700 covers a pine casket and burial plot or cremation and a urn, DHS and Perry officials said. Caskets are sometimes buried two or three to a plot to further save money, Deak said.

So far this fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30, the state has paid \$2.8 million to help bury or cremate 4,924 bodies, according to the DHS. During the same period last fiscal year, the state paid \$3.5 million to cremate or bury 4,887 bodies, according to the DHS.

Usually, the state picks up two-thirds of the costs, while counties kick in the rest, medical examiners in Oakland and Wayne counties said.

But that only occurs if the body comes through a county morgue. Many bodies are reported for pickup at hospitals, hospices and homeless shelters, officials said. In those cases, the state covers the burial.

In Wayne, Schmidt said his office spends about \$30,000 annually on burials, investigations into the identities of the bodies and tracking down relatives. He said his office sees about 150 bodies annually that are unidentified or unclaimed or whose families do not have the money to immediately bury a relative.

Celebrating lives

Seven people participated in last month's memorial for 26 unclaimed and unidentified bodies from Wayne County at Perry Funeral Home on Trumbull.

Calling it a Celebration of Friends, members lit a candle for each person and recited the person's name and birth date, if it was available.

They remembered a 51-year-old man who died from blunt force injuries in Southfield last year; a 71-year-old man who died in a Detroit nursing home earlier this year and an 82-year-old man who died on a Livonia street from complications of cancer.

Prayers were shared and three flowers were arranged in the shape of a cross near the candles.

First, the group paid tribute to the adults, and then the babies.

"May they rest in peace," they said together.

A moment of silence followed, and then singing.

"Bind us together, Lord. ...Bind us together with love."

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Find this article at:

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Bay area events for Monday, Sept. 15

Posted by [The Bay City Times](#) September 15, 2008 08:13AM

LEARN ABOUT ELECTION ISSUES during a Voter Registration Fair for Arenac County residents from 10 a.m. to noon at the Arenac County Department of Human Services, 3709 Deep River Road, Standish. Participants can register to vote, practice casting a ballot and learn about all aspects of voting. Info: www.michigan.gov/dhs.



DHS plans voter registration fair

FROM STAFF REPORTS

September 13, 2008 12:00 am

TRAVERSE CITY -- A voter registration fair will be held Sept. 16 sponsored by the Grand Traverse/Leelanau Department of Human Services.

The event will be held from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at the DHS office building at 701 S. Elmwood St. in Traverse City. DHS clients and area residents will be offered voting information, practice casting a ballot and can register to vote at the event, which is also organized by the League of Women Voters-Grand Traverse Area.

Residents can obtain a voter registration application or register to vote at any DHS office in the state. The registration deadline is Oct. 6 to vote in the Nov. 4 general election.

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Gladwin County DHS hosts Voter Registration Fair

Published: Tuesday, September 9, 2008 2:01 PM CDT
Gladwin Record & Clairion

GLADWIN ...#8220; As part of the Gladwin County Department of Human Services' continuing efforts to provide needed and valued services to community residents, this local DHS office will hold a Voter Registration Fair to help register Michigan voters.

At the fair, DHS clients and local residents can receive information on all aspects of voting, practice casting a ballot, and register to vote. Voting gives every Michigan resident the opportunity to participate in all levels of government.

If Michigan citizens would like to make their voice matter in the upcoming election, they do not have much time: the deadline for registering to vote in the Nov. 4, 2008 general election is Oct. 6.

The Gladwin County Voter Registration Fair on Sept. 17 is an opportunity for local residents to stop by and take a few minutes to register to vote. The Voter Registration Fair is a collaborative effort between the Gladwin County DHS and County Clerk Laura Flach.

As of July 2008, 21,731 people have registered to vote in our county. Throughout the year Michigan residents may obtain a voter registration application at their DHS office and register to vote there and at any other DHS local office across the state.

On Sept. 17, DHS will host an MSU Extension Family Nutrition Program tasting event along with the Voter Registration event.

They will have a variety of fruit and vegetables to try along with activity sheets for kids, information for moms and dads on ways to increase fruit and vegetable intake, cutting boards, shopping lists, and recipe books. All materials are free of charge just for stopping by and participating.

Come on out and try some different foods and ways to prepare your fruit and veggies. It's a great way to spend your time while you wait to register or just on its own.

For more information, please consult the DHS Web site at www.michigan.gov/dhs.

3-year-old boy left behind after trip to Ann Arbor park with his daycare

Posted by [anash](#) September 12, 2008 20:39PM

Authorities are investigating how a 3-year-old boy on a field trip with his daycare center was left behind at a park near downtown Ann Arbor on Thursday.

Concerned adults called Ann Arbor officers to West Park at about 12:30 p.m. after noticing the preschooler playing by himself without any adult supervision for an extended period of time, police reports said. It's unclear exactly how long the boy was left alone at the park.

Contact reporter Art Aisner at
aaisner@annarbornews.com
or 734-994-6823.

The boy was calm but couldn't tell officers his full name, his parents' names or where his caregivers went, police said. Witnesses told police they thought the boy arrived with a group of children at about 9:30 a.m., but that group had left earlier.

Police began calling local daycare centers to determine whether any children were missing.

That's when Geraldina Powell said she discovered a 3-year-old boy in their care wasn't at lunch with the rest of the children at the Wee Wisdom Child Development Center. The daycare at 511 Miller Avenue is less than a block from the park.

Powell, the center's director, said she immediately ran to the park with an emergency identification card for the boy and found him there with police officers. Powell told police head counts are usually required any time children leave a field trip, but it was "somehow overlooked" Thursday, police reports said.

Powell said she was at the park that morning, supervising 10 children with another adult. She said Friday that the group was in a rush to return to the center because it was lunchtime and one child needed to use the bathroom.

"It was an honest mistake, human error and was not done on purpose," she said. "I apologized, I'm remorseful and can understand the anger and sense of broken trust. I run a quality child care center and can only plan into the future to make sure this will never happen again."

The boy didn't return to the center Friday. His mother - who asked not to be identified by The News - said her son was in good spirits and has had only positive experiences with the center until Thursday.

The mother said she planned to meet with center officials late Friday afternoon to discuss the incident. Reached Friday evening, the mother declined further comment.

Police notified the Washtenaw County Department of Human Services, and the case was referred to the state Department of Human Services, which regulates daycare centers. Police said that's common practice in such situations.

Ann Arbor Detective Sgt. Jeff Connelly said police will look into the case, but he doubted criminal charges would be filed because the child was not injured, and there was no intent to neglect him.

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September 15, 2008

Area hospitals take a hit to care for patients

Discounted services threaten fiscal health

BY PATRICIA ANSTETT
FREE PRESS MEDICAL WRITER

Michigan's slumping economy and population changes that are leaving the state with older, poorer, sicker residents are taking a big hit on Michigan hospitals.

The hospitals spent an unprecedented \$2.6 billion last year providing free and discounted care, writing off uncollected patient debts and making up for losses from Medicare, Medicaid and other government programs.

The figures, to be released today by the Michigan Health & Hospital Association, a group reporting information for 132 of the state's 146 nonprofit hospitals, climbed from \$1.7 million in 2006 and continue rising this year, underscoring the growing call nationwide for health reform, industry leaders say.

"This is one of the most important issues confronting the health care industry today," said Jim Connelly, chief financial officer of the Henry Ford Health System. "If we want to keep health systems financially viable, we have to find a solution to this problem."

Tim Eckels, vice president of public policy for Trinity Health, a large Novi-based Catholic health system, added: "The numbers are unsustainable" and "speak to the way we need to change health care delivery in southeast Michigan to keep more people out of the emergency department and the hospital."

Trinity has teamed up with the University of Michigan in a program to shift people from emergency department care to primary care doctors. The program serves 9,000 previously uninsured people.

With 1.1 million uninsured people in Michigan, another 1.8 million on Medicaid, and 1.5 million on Medicare, hospitals and free clinics are stretched thin trying to provide care. Many clinics have waiting lists.

"The safety net has big holes in it," said Sister Mary Ellen Howard, director of Cabrini Clinic in Detroit, the nation's oldest free clinic. She tries to refer some patients closer to their home, but "the response I often get is: 'I already called there and they are not accepting new patients.' So I tell them to come."

New patients are accepted several times a year at a clinic on Detroit's east side, run by St. John and Trinity Health, but every time open enrollment begins, "we're maxed out within 30 minutes of opening the telephone lines," said Kevin DiCola, manager of corporate communications for Trinity Health.

Faced with some of the leanest times in years, which administrators blame in part on higher free-care costs and losses from government programs, hospitals are cutting staff and consolidating programs for potential savings.

Earlier this year, St. John Health laid off 300 staffers and froze 100 other vacant positions. In July, it began charging patients \$15 for visits to two Detroit clinics it funds for uninsured people.

St. John spent \$15.2 million on free care last year, mostly for emergency department and inpatient care for uninsured people. It lost \$65 million on under-reimbursement from care for Medicaid patients. St. John is the second-largest provider of care to Medicaid patients, after the Detroit Medical Center.

Medicaid pays less than any other insurance, as made clear in the state's only comparison of hospital charges versus insurance payments compiled by the Grand Rapids-based Spectrum Health System. For example, the hospital charges \$74.61 for a routine chest X-ray. Medicaid paid \$26.97; Medicare, \$45.62, and other insurers, \$63.07.

The DMC last year lost \$86.9 million on Medicare and Medicaid services, \$4.7 million for uncollected debts and \$69 million for free care, according to spokeswoman Lori Mouton.

Oakwood Healthcare Inc., based in Dearborn -- with \$40 million in bad debt and free care and \$15.6 million in Medicaid losses -- continues to review staffing and other issues to offset losses, said Douglas Welday, executive vice president and chief financial officer.

Hospitals with lower operating margins "have to make up the difference somewhere else," said Tom Marks, senior finance director and revenue cycle officer for the University of Michigan Hospitals and Health Centers in Ann Arbor.

Often, that means higher charges to insured people, he said.

Lower margins also "diminish our ability to invest in our future, including facility and equipment improvements, new technology and expansion," Marks said.

Statewide, most hospitals are seeing a 25% jump in costs for free care, losses on uncollected patient debt and care for people with government insurance, said David Seaman, senior vice president of the hospital association.

Even once financially robust health systems such as Beaumont Hospitals, based in Royal Oak, are feeling the pinch. Beaumont lost \$68 million last year on care to Medicare patients, for example, and an additional \$25 million on Medicaid. Beaumont sees more Medicare patients than any U.S. hospital, except for one in Florida.

"It's not just the uninsured, but the underinsured, causing this problem," said Nick Vitale, senior vice president for financial operations at Beaumont.

Faced with \$25 million in losses from uncollected debt from patients, Beaumont this year increased discounts on care to uninsured people up to 40% of a bill, from 15%. A decade ago, many hospitals charged uninsured people the full charge for a hospital service.

Contact **PATRICIA ANSTETT** at panstett@freepress.com.



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Forum addresses issue of poverty in state

Patty Ramus

POSTED: September 12, 2008

From the time he was a teenager, Andy Hoeft was used to being employed at jobs where he could make a decent living.

All of that changed about three years ago when he fell off of a roof. The injury resulted in a leg amputation.

When Hoeft got out of the hospital, he had no means of making money to support himself and his family, or to keep a roof over their head. He said it made him feel like a complete failure.

He eventually learned of the services offered through the Michigan Department of Human Services. Through DHS, his family was able to get food stamps, assistance with finding employment and help with paying bills. In the last four to five months, Hoeft has been employed at KFC and his fiancée has gotten her driver's license. DHS will provide help to the family to get transportation.

Hoeft and his family currently are residing at a homeless shelter, but the assistance he's received has given him some hope, he said.

"It breaks my heart because I'm a man that's supposed to provide. But with this program, my son and my family can feel whatever little joy they have with what little they've got," he said. "With heart and determination you can make it through anything."

Hoeft and his family are just one example of the roughly 2 million people who are in or near poverty in Michigan. Teary eyed, he told his story to DHS officials and representatives of area service organizations Friday morning during a poverty summit kickoff and media roundtable.

During the roundtable, DHS officials talked to the organizations about their importance in reducing poverty in the community and statewide. The event also was meant to alert the organizations about Voices for Action 2008 Poverty Summit on Nov. 13 at Cobo Hall in Detroit. State officials hope to bring 3,000 leaders, people in poverty and decision makers from around the state together to address the issue.

"Poverty in this state is pervasive and important to address," said DHS Director Ishmael Ahmed. "This is something that affects everyone. The question we should ask ourselves is why has poverty become such a low priority in our state ... in our communities?"

The State of Michigan is supporting the national Half in 10 Campaign to reduce poverty by half in 10

Article Photos



News Photo by Patty Ramus
Ishmael Ahmed, Michigan Department of Human Services director, speaks during a poverty summit kickoff and media roundtable at Alpena Community College Friday morning.

years. Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., has plans to introduce a series of bills that will help the state to get involved more directly in the campaign, Ahmed said.

According to Ahmed, initiatives laid out by Gov. Jennifer Granholm in her State of the State address earlier this year will help reduce poverty in Michigan. Those initiatives included providing training needed by people to move from lost jobs to work, universal health care and universalizing higher education.

Ahmed said there won't be success with reducing poverty in Michigan until the state has the help of local community service organizations. Reducing poverty is not an easy task, but it's doable.

"We have the resources to do it, we know what we have to do to do it, but we need local activity. Poverty is different in every single community," he said. "The fixes for it, while there are universal fixes, there are local as well. Many of the programs that we're seeing in these communities are addressing that. We need to have more synergy here. We need to get everyone working on the diverse outcomes of poverty as it has the face in our community to change things."

Ahmed encouraged local representatives to attend the summit in Detroit. He said their participation will be important because planning will take place in eight different regions at the state. During the summit, representatives will determine priorities from their region. The regions will then receive money to assist money for an action plan and technical support, he said.

During the roundtable, Michigan Works Area Manager Dawn Stone gave a description of the Jobs Training Education program offered by Michigan Works. Maj. Joan Stoker of the Salvation Army in Alpena talked about the Call Us For Help and church partnership programs.

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Poverty summit being promoted

By Laura Mead - lmead@dailypress.net

POSTED: September 12, 2008

ESCANABA - Officials from the Michigan Department of Human Services visited Escanaba Thursday to share details of an initiative to reduce poverty in Michigan. Leaders from the Upper Peninsula will participate in a statewide poverty summit in November.

To combat poverty in Michigan, key people will be gathered at the first statewide poverty summit, called "Voices for Action: The 2008 Poverty Summit," Nov. 13 in Detroit.

The event will bring together community leaders and families to share strategies and develop connections so that they can work to reduce poverty and provide help to Michigan families, said Ismael Ahmed, director of Michigan Department of Human Services.

Russell Sexton, Department of Human Services, Menominee, Bill Dubord, executive director of Menominee-Delta-Schoolcraft Community Action Agency, and Earl Hawn, executive director of Alger-Marquette Community Action Board, will be attending the summit as Region 1 (Upper Peninsula) leaders.

The summit will be the launching point for the initiative called "Voices for Action Network," - an effort to maximize economic opportunities and reduce poverty. The event will also discuss ways Michigan communities are already addressing poverty. Ahmed named the work of churches, civic groups, and individuals in the Upper Peninsula as examples of these successful efforts.

"That's why poverty here is less than the average across the state," he said.

Of course, poverty is still present in the Upper Peninsula. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 estimates, 11.7 percent of Delta County's population lives in poverty. Communities of the Upper Peninsula face rural poverty - a type that is exacerbated by isolation, said Ahmed.

"In the U.P. it's harder to find assistance because resources are scattered," said Chuck Jones, Department of Human Services official.

The national poverty level is \$14,000 for a family of four, but Ahmed said defining poverty in this manner is often insufficient.

"Low-income is the term used for individuals who do not make enough money to assist their needs," he said. "(Poverty) affects us all and it's not that far away from our own lives. Many of us are only one or

Article Photos



Ismael Ahmed

two paychecks away."

There are 2 million people in or near the poverty level in Michigan, and nearly one-third of the state's population are considered low-income status, said Ahmed, including a half a million children.

Ahmed said the initiative's core goals are the same Gov. Jennifer Granholm outlined in her State of the State address, which include providing jobs, education, training, health care, and housing to all. Granholm will be a key speaker at the summit in November.

As part of the initiative, the MDHS has also earmarked a \$7,000 planning grant for each of the eight regions to help them create strategies to reduce poverty and maximize economic opportunities at the community level, said Ahmed.

The plan is for regions to create their own sustainable long-term funding from the start-up fund, so they can continue in the long-term effort to reduce poverty, said Cathy Truss, MDHS administrative assistant.

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Sunday, September 14, 2008

Poverty summit planned

Sunday, September 14, 2008

MENOMINEE - A staggering number of people statewide live in poverty, and state officials will gather in November to discuss the problem. The summit, which is scheduled for Nov. 13 in Detroit's Cobo Hall, also will include residents of the state of Michigan. Full story in today's EagleHerald.

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